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1

The Inspiring Classroom

One of the greatest needs of the human spirit is to be inspired and to inspire.

—Lance Secretan

Imagine it is the end of your career as a teacher and you are closing the door of your classroom for the last time. You turn the key in the lock and seal a lifetime of work dedicated to students and the pursuit of learning. As you walk down the empty corridor for the last time, you can hear echoing voices of past students and what they have to say about you, their teacher.

Will you hear this?

“Oh, I remember Ms Rennie. Boy could she cover a curriculum!”

“Yeah, she always made it to the end of the book.”

“And she sure was funny. Ummm, what class did I have her for?”

“She was the most consistent teacher we ever had. You could count on her to do the same thing *every* day.”

Or will you hear this?

“What I remember most is that she taught me *how* to learn. And she taught me *how* to think, not what to think.”

“She valued our ideas and our thoughts. She really listened to us.”

“Yeah, I loved being in her class. It was our class, not just hers.”

What will your legacy be? Will you be known for covering curriculum and rote learning? Or will your students remember you for cultivating curiosity and teaching deep understandings?

Figure 2.1 Foundations of an Inspiring Classroom

CONNECTS TO:		FOUNDATIONS OF AN INSPIRING CLASSROOM		
		Chapter 3	Chapter 3	Chapter 6
		Honoured and Inspired Learners	A Community Built Upon Honouring Diversity	Engaging and Meaningful Lessons
KEY EDUCATIONAL THEORIES	Choice Theory Glasser	Personal needs are recognised and responded to; relationships are built on a foundation of trust	Focus is on students' building power <i>within</i> themselves, on learning <i>with</i> students not teaching <i>at</i> them	Personal filters influence what we experience and how we understand Mastery learning
	Constructivist	Empowerment; students discover principles themselves; students own the learning	Experiences allow for students to be willing and able to learn; positive classroom experience All ideas are valued	Students create meaning using prior knowledge to construct own understanding
	Brain Research	Each brain takes in and processes information <i>differently</i> , through varied contexts and patterns	The brain is a social brain, an emotional brain; it learns most effectively working with others in a safe, supportive community	The brain learns best when the learning is relevant to the learner
HIGH-QUALITY CURRICULUM				

You may be the ones to learn how to weave these three strengths together: a swirling spiral of our unique gifts, our desire for community, and our need for individual freedom. If you figure this out, we will move forward as a planetary community where people experience what it means to be fully human.

—Margaret Wheatley

If we reflect upon these foundational theories, it becomes obvious that one-size-fits-all practices don't work. Therefore, if we are to honour and inspire all learners in our classrooms, we need to find engaging and meaningful paths to differentiate our instruction and meet our learning targets. Think back over your past few weeks of teaching. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I set a tone in the room that respects and honours all learners? How do I know? What evidence can I provide that I have honoured my students?
- Is the physical environment in my classroom invigorating and student centred?
- Is there a sense of community in my classroom? Do students respect each other? Do they learn and grow together?
- Do I offer various ways for students to access the content I am teaching? What are those ways?
- Do I present new ideas and information to students in various ways?
- How do I allow students to process what I just taught them? Do they have a choice in how they get to process new learning?
- How do I check for understanding? Do I take into consideration that students show understanding in different ways?

Reflecting on our answers to these questions, we should begin to get a picture of whether our teaching style and our beliefs are in alignment with the three foundations of the inspiring classroom. We should also notice the balance we offer in terms of routine and novelty in our classrooms.

CHUNK: *new information is presented to the learner.* The brain learns best when it receives new information in small chunks. Because each brain perceives incoming information differently, we need to vary how we offer chunks of new learning.



CHEW: *the learner has to make sense of the information.* Each brain has a unique way of connecting new information to what it already knows. Therefore, we need to offer students a variety of ways to CHEW on new information we have presented to them.



CHECK: *the teacher checks whether the learner has processed the information.* We know that individuals possess unique talents and therefore demonstrate understanding in unique ways. We need to balance the ways we CHECK for student understanding.



Keeping the *Chunk, Chew and Check* framework in mind as we design our lessons helps us vary our teaching and offer better access to learning for all students in our classrooms. We also need to support differentiating by creating an environment and working with the content in ways that honour all learners.

ENVIRONMENT: *tone and setting of the classroom.* The learning brain learns best in a safe environment. We need to work to build a community and an environment that respects all learners and offers them safe access to learning.

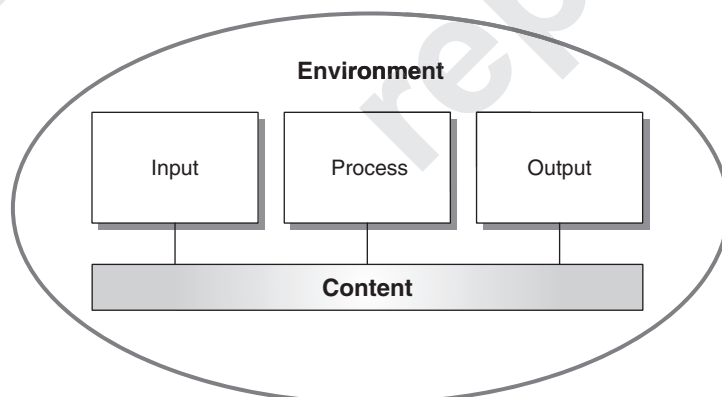


CONTENT: *what we teach.* Our students come to us with different readiness levels and different interests. We need to teach to the same learning objectives, but vary the content based on the readiness levels or interests of our students.



This overview of the three foundations and five elements of the inspiring classroom gives us a framework, a schema, to guide our thinking. Throughout the rest of this book, we offer concrete and practical strategies for creating the inspiring classroom. Remember, we must be guided *first* by our beliefs. When we teach from our beliefs, the practices will follow.

Figure 2.3 Five Elements We Can Differentiate



C U KAN Sample

The following is an example of a six-day lesson plan developed using the C U KAN model. C U KAN lessons can be longer projects, like the example, but they can also be short one-day lessons, homework or even ongoing class work. Students can also work in groups or independently. Each component was written based on the “Learning Target” (Figure 6.3), which also appears at the beginning of the student handout for them to have as a reference and reminder of the learning target.

Figure 6.3 Example of a Clear Learning Target

Learning Target	
Name: Kathleen Kryza	Year Level of Lesson: Secondary School
<p>Concept (Overarching Theme): Inspirational Leadership As a result, students should . . .</p> <p>Understand That (Key principles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Martin Luther King was a civil rights activist in the US, and is an important figure in world history. • You can help to create Martin Luther King’s dream by creating peace in yourselves, your community and your world. • Personal and outside influences shape people’s cultural, religious, gender and social beliefs. <p>Know (Facts)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace, Freedom, Equal Rights, Fair, Nonviolence, Tolerance, Prejudice, Racism, Diversity (You decide which terms you wish students to comprehend.) • MLK key principles for nonviolent protest <p>Able to Do (Skills/Be able to . . .) Determine important from interesting facts about Dr King and take effective notes for your project</p>	

Rubrics for Student Assessment

Once you have developed a lesson using the C U KAN framework, you can easily develop the rubric for assessing how well students have mastered new knowledge, deepened their understanding, or developed their learning skills. Below are steps and suggestions for developing a rubric aligned to your C U KAN outline.

- The first two sections of the rubric are simply the *Understand* and *Know* of your C U KAN. And guess what? You already developed those at the beginning of your unit. Under the “Expectations” column of the rubric, add the *Understand* and *Know* objectives that you developed.
- The third section of the rubric is titled “Quality Work”. Prior to starting to work on their projects, students are expected to develop at least three quality criteria specific to their project type, that is, skit, poster, and so on. The students must be specific and avoid using generic phrases such as, “We’ll work hard”, “We’ll take our time” or “It will look good”. (See the “Resources” section for ideas about quality project standards.)
- Before the students work on their projects, review their criteria for quality work. Students are not allowed to work on their project until you have initialled the rubric showing your approval of their criteria. This is important because when you are marking the quality section, the students will be marked based on the quality criteria that they committed to achieving on the project. (e.g. “You said you were going to have costumes and props in your skit, but you don’t. That brings your mark down for that section of the rubric”.)
- You might want to include sections on the rubric that assess learning skills, such as work habits, group effort or note taking. There could be a section for any of the *Able to do* skills that you developed under that “Able to do” in your C U KAN.